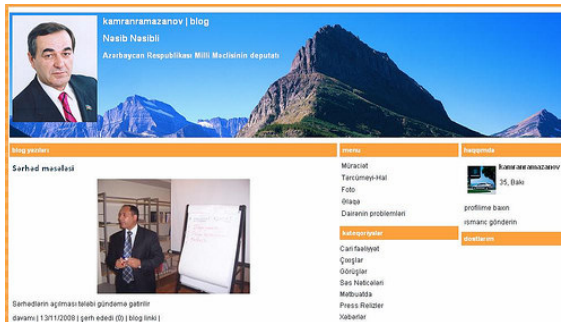# INTERNET ACCESS AND TRAINING PROGRAM

MONTHLY HIGHLIGHTS, DECEMBER 2008

The USAID-funded, IREX-administered Internet Access and Training Program (IATP) uses information and communication technology for development (**ICT4D**) to meet community needs through a network of centers offering free access to the internet, training, and citizen-led events. ICT facilitates the free access to and exchange of information, the modernization of local organizations and businesses, and the creation of community-based and international networks, thus empowering citizens to advocate for change in their communities.

ICT FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE

Blogging from Baku: Azerbaijani Parliament Gains New Online Presence
Five officials from **Azerbaijan's** Parliament created blogs and posted them online in December as part of a good governance initiative. In cooperation with USAID-funded Development Alternatives, Inc. (DAI) and the Media Advancement Project, IATP is implementing this professional education project to assist members of Parliament and their staffs in Baku, Shirvan, Imishli, and Sumgait in mastering ICT skills and creating their own blogs. This online presence provides constituents with more information about government activities, creates a closer connection between government and citizens and increases the level of transparency in government.

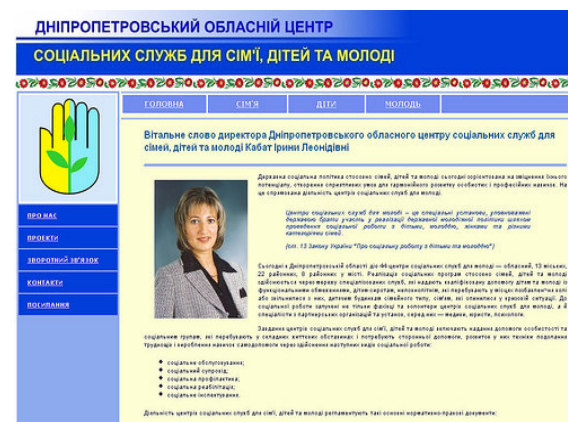**Azerbaijani MP and former Ambassador to Iran Nasim Nasibli launched a blog with the help of IATP**

IATP volunteer Samir Yahyayev, who had completed IATP training several years ago, taught the Parliament members and their support staff about creating blogs, posting articles, uploading pictures, internet etiquette, and increasing online visitor traffic. As a result of the training, the Azerbaijani officials' blogs are appearing online and they can be found at http://kamranramazanov.blogmilli.com, http://mmehdi.blogmilli.com, http://mmfirdovsi.blogmilli.com, http://rafikismayilov.blogmilli.com, and http://vuqarqaracayev.blogmilli.com.

Social Services Become More Accessible for Vulnerable Groups in Ukraine
Economically disadvantaged families with members having disabilities can now more easily access social services thanks to an online resource developed by government officials, who were participants of ICT training in October and November as part of IATP's ongoing e-government initiative in **Dnipropetrovsk, Ukraine**.

The official site of the Dnipropetrovsk Regional Center of Social Services for Family Children and Youth was presented in late October at a press conference for 17 local mass media representatives, organized by the USAID-funded Ukrainian Reform of Education Program (UREP). The website is currently being promoted by local TV and newspapers through public service announcements, as well as by city social services, and IATP's NGO and library partners in Dnipropetrovsk. UREP facilitates the development of civil society and a market economy in Ukraine (http://urep.cure.org.ua/projects/urep).

Center of Social Services' website developed by government officials at the IATP center in Dnipropetrovsk, Ukraine

Since October, the website has been upgraded with new information on the organization and the social services it provides. The online resource is a hub of important information for people living in remote towns and villages and for people with disabilities. Website visitors can view the network of city, district, and village centers of social services for the Dnipropetrovsk region. The website also offers tools for interactive communication between visitors and social workers. Handicapped IATP participant Dmytro Krasniuk asked

social workers about state support services for handicapped children in Ukraine. The social workers gave him detailed descriptions of the state services offered and links to official websites to access them. Krasniuk commented, "The development of online resources of this type proves the effectiveness of e-government projects. State bodies are becoming more open and transparent, which allows for better communication with community members."

ICT FOR BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

New ICT Skills Help Guesthouse Owners Develop their Businesses
ICT skills continue to help Georgian guesthouse owners develop their businesses, connect with tourism companies, attract new clients, and thus adapt to the highly competitive tourism market. Nana Kokiashvili, the owner of a private guesthouse in the small, picturesque town of Signani, summarizes her success best: "I was able to improve the services of my guesthouse, launch a partnership with a major tourist company, and attract more tourists through my website. All this was possible only due to the skills and knowledge I obtained at the **Telavi** IATP Center."

When Kokiashvili realized the important role of the internet and online marketing tools in today's tourism market, she decided in July 2008 to enroll in a month-long IATP computer, internet, and Web design course. In August, Kokiashvili used her newly acquired skills to develop her guesthouse's website (http://nanahause.ge.iatp.net), which provides photos, detailed descriptions of services offered, useful information for tourists, and key contact information. She also registered the site on popular search engines. Soon after she published her guesthouse's website, Kokiashvili was contacted by the well-known Georgian tourist company Georgian Explorer, who was interested in partnering with her business.

Nana Kokiashvili developed a website for her guesthouse after undergoing ICT training at the Telavi IATP Center

The partnership with Georgian Explorer and the additional publicity due to the website has resulted in increased numbers of visitors to the guesthouse. Kokiashvili also uses her ICT skills to learn about new marketing techniques used by other guesthouses in the country. After conducting research online, Kokiashvili renovated the interior of her guesthouse, and introduced new services for visitors, including offering information on possible tours and transportation in the surrounding area, and providing food from the guesthouse's farm.

Nana Kokiashvili is one of 78 entrepreneurs trained by IATP in December.

Tajik Farmers Learn Effective Business Practices
Eight farmers from **Vahdat, Tajikistan,** acquired ICT skills during IATP training initiated by the former IATP user and Project Coordinator of Dehkan Farms Service Center (DFSC) Rustam Nasriddinov. The goal of the training was to enhance farmers' ICT skills and to show them how advanced technology can help them develop their businesses.

Nasriddinov, a successful farmer himself, shared his achievements with his colleagues and presented the website he designed after IATP training (http://lola.freenet.tj). He explained how he became aware of using ICT in farming during an exchange trip to the United States through the Cochran Fellowship Program under the US Department of Agriculture's Foreign Agricultural Service, "In the US, I was impressed to watch a farmer working on his laptop in the middle of his field. I decided to share my knowledge with other farmers in Tajikistan and hope that one day our farmers will use ICT to improve their daily work."

A Tajik farmer learns about the opportunities presented by ICT for his business.

The head of Khoji Kurbon Farming Sadullo Kurbonov said, "Today the farming sector in Tajikistan suffers in its technological development. It's worth mentioning that significant quantities of fruits and vegetables are delivered to the capital city from Vahdat. Thus, such training will help farmers to move to a new level of work." Greater online presence for farming organizations in Tajikistan helps them to improve their productivity and find new markets for their goods.

The head of Rozikiyon Farming Hojisobir Safoev commented, "Although we have the means to purchase necessary equipment, we do not have the skills necessary to use them in running our businesses. I would not have expected ICT to be so useful for farmers." In addition, the community could watch a news story on training for farmers at IATP, which was broadcasted by the state-owned TV Safina.

Another farmer and IATP user Samiev Amriddin mentioned, "Today in Tajikistan farmers still use old information on farming. This sector, however, has dramatically developed with the technology available today." He continued, "Now we are able to find necessary information about the prevention of bacterial infection, new methods of irrigation, and different types of pesticides. We hope that this training will help us to use our means more efficiently and be more productive."

Kurbonov and Amriddin bought and began doing business on laptops after completing ICT training in December at the local IATP center. Other training participants throughout December visited the center several times in order to find necessary information for their businesses on the internet. Other farmers were inspired by Nasriddinov and decided to create a website for the Vahdat Farming Association to connect Tajik farmers to markets around the world.

Self-Learner Becomes Electronics Engineer with Assistance from IATP
A man from Turkmenistan used internet resources to learn about electronics repair. He is now a successful electronic equipment service engineer in **Balkanabat, Turkmenistan.**

Pavel Polyakov had been interested in electronics since his teens, but his high school lacked a technology curriculum. After graduating from high school in 2006, he searched for an opportunity to continue his education, discovering training opportunities at his local IATP center. He began visiting the center in Balkanabat, and after participating in various training, gained a range of skills from basic computing to using computer graphics software and conducting internet research. Thanks to free internet access at the IATP center, he found online manuals and Web portals for self-instruction on TV, audio, video, and radio maintenance. With IATP-developed manuals on computer hardware, Polyakov worked with IATP staff to become proficient in fixing common computer problems.

Since late 2008, Polyakov has been in great demand as an electronic equipment service engineer in Balkanabat. He provides diagnostic and maintenance services and assembles a wide range of equipment, including consumer electronics, cash registers, televisions, radio, and computer devices. Polyakov now serves most of the local stores equipped with electronic devices.

The self-made engineer commented, "My experience in learning modern information technology at the IATP center encouraged me to continue my studies and master electronics, which had been my dream for a long time. I am still using IATP resources to perfect my professional skills and improve my ICT knowledge. In the future, I plan to receive a diploma in radio electronics and be the best specialist in my town." Polyakov was one of 510 students to receive IATP training in Balkanabat in 2008.

ICT FOR PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

New IATP Center Opened to Serve Citizens in Moldova
The official opening of the IATP center in **Comrat**, **Moldova,** took place on December 19, 2008. IATP began its work in Comrat in September with support from USAID and Gagauzia's Department of Education. Comrat is located in the region of Gagauzia, which has semi-independent status within Moldova. Access to information and communication with the rest of the country remains a challenge as citizens in Gaguazia speak Russian and the Turkic language Gaguaz, not Romanian, which is widely spoken in throughout the rest of the country. IATP is expanding its presence in Moldova, reaching out to new populations, such as residents of the breakaway region of Transnistria, and connecting them with other parts of the country.

USAID Program Supervisor Linden and Gagauzia Governor Formuzal cut the ribbon to the Comrat IATP Center

Representatives from USAID, local authorities, IATP, and the media from Comrat and Chisinau participated in the official opening of the Comrat IATP Center. The Governor of Gagauzia Mikhail Formuzal opened the ceremony, followed by the USAID Program Supervisor in Moldova Harry Linden. IATP Director for Eurasia Mark Skogen and IATP Country Coordinator for Moldova Anna Balmush informed the audience about the new center's planned activities and the development of IATP centers in Moldova in general. In addition to providing services, such as computer and internet training, to the local population, the new center will facilitate online networking and the sharing of best practices among IATP users in Chisinau and Comrat.

ICT FOR DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT

Eurasia Citizens Learn about the Role of Students and Web 2.0 in US Presidential Elections during Online Forum
The 2008 US Presidential election garnered interest around the world, demonstrated by the 50 individuals across Eurasia who logged into an IATP forum to learn about the role of students and Web 2.0 technologies in the election and preceding campaign.

The forum (http://forum.iatp.net/viewtopic.php?t=265), which took place from November 24-December 12, featured the Executive Director of the Minnesota Public Interest Research Group (MPIRG) Joshua Winters and two active MPIRG members, students Ryan Kennedy and Joey Dobson. The three guests shared best practices of involving university and

college students in voting and in MPIRG activities. MPIRG is a non-profit, student-directed organization that empowers students to engage in their communities and to take collective action in the public interest throughout the state of Minnesota. Participants from Eurasia included students, teachers, journalists, NGO representatives, and other interested parties from **Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Turkmenistan, Ukraine,** and **Uzbekistan.**

IATP users posed questions on topics, such as organizing advocacy campaigns with students and NGO officials, tracking legislative activity, utilizing Web 2.0 in electoral campaigns, and documenting student voting statistics. Winters noted that "Facebook, online text messaging tools, and MPIRG's website became information dissemination vehicles and ways of capturing contact information so that we could follow up with additional educational opportunities, reminders to vote, and answers to questions about the voting process. There simply is no substitute for direct, in-person contact with young people. All of the studies done here in the US that identify what motivates young people support this conclusion." The guest expert also dispelled the myth widely believed in Eurasia that Americans vote largely on the internet. He noted the various security reasons, as well as challenges relating to voter identity verification, that hinder such a change.

During the course of the online discussion, the Eurasian participants also learned the American experts' strategies to educate and motivate young people, and tactics to coordinate election campaigns among students. For example, commenting on the role of free discussions and conversations, Dobson said, "I believe strongly that open conversations between those with differing viewpoints can often be the most fruitful way to expand our understanding of the issues we care about. That mindset allowed me to refrain from telling my peers how I thought they should vote, and instead, engage in generative discussions about what we would like to see in a candidate and how we think our country needs to move forward."

NGO officials interacting in the forum also learned from their US colleagues about the role of NGOs in campaigns. The MPIRG representatives discussed the sorts of NGOs active in elections, the limitations on their activities, and some of MPIRG's successes in local advocacy campaigns.

Last year, IATP organized more than ten international expert-moderated online forums to share expertise with their Eurasian counterparts.

ICT FOR EDUCATION

Georgian Teacher Applies ICT Skills to Improve Her Lessons

Teacher Babulia Bekauri practices Microsoft Excel in the Tbilisi IATP Center

Not all students learn well from lectures. Students known as visual learners do best when they can see concepts illustrated in front of them. With this in mind, a Georgian school teacher applied new technical skills she obtained during an IATP training series to create valuable visual aids for her lessons. Twenty-six-year-old psychologist Babulia Bekuari at the Okros Satsmisi School in **Tbilisi, Georgia,** has always been open to new teaching techniques and methods. To date, however, she lacked the technical skills to diversify her instruction. Bekauri turned to her local IATP center, a well-known provider of free

training services for the city's professionals, and underwent an intensive computer and internet course throughout the month of November.

In December, she started using these new skills to improve her standard psychology lessons. Bekauri added visual components to her lessons, incorporating multimedia presentations and handouts with pictograms, comparative tables, and charts. These aides immediately resulted in improved attendance and student progress. Seventh-grade student Roman Giorgadze commented, "We are coming to our teacher's lessons with great pleasure now, since we know she prepared something new and interesting. Her lessons are different from other [teachers]; with the introduction of visual materials they became more interesting."

Also in December, Bekauri was selected by the school administration to represent the school in their annual report before the Ministry of Education of Georgia. Commenting on the presentation delivered by Bekauri, the Director of the school Mia Gogava noted, "The whole pedagogic team and I were personally very proud that the presentation about our school was done in such an impressive and professional manner."

Bekauri contacted IATP in late December to share her success. "The eager eyes of pupils coming to their lessons with pleasure and thirst to receive new knowledge are the greatest reward for any teacher." Bekauri is one of 263 teachers trained by IATP in Georgia since 2007.

ICT FOR DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES

Children from HIV/AIDS-Infected Families Benefit from Grant Received with IATP Assistance
Biaz Gul (White Rose), a **Moldovan** NGO for the protection of rights and social reintegration of people with HIV/AIDS, received a grant in mid-December from the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). The grant for $1,000 will allow Biaz Gul to implement a project to improve the quality of life for children of families suffering from HIV/AIDS.

The NGO's staff members learned to use computers and the internet at the IATP center in Comrat, which led to their online search of sponsors and guidance on how to prepare grant proposals. Biaz Gul's project made the New Year's holiday special for children from HIV/AIDS families from the region of Gagauzia with an all-expenses-paid trip to Chisinau on December 28. They visited the holiday tree in the square and the zoo, enjoyed dinner at a restaurant, received New Year's gifts, and met other children facing similar circumstances.

Biaz Gul staff member Alexander Zavrichko commented, "The knowledge received at the IATP center in Comrat and the opportunity to access high-speed internet is very important for our organization, especially for finding new funds and negotiating with international organizations and other NGOs to collaborate on similar initiatives."

ICT FOR CITIZEN ACTION

IATP User Advocates Tolerance in Multiethnic Society
The director of the NGO Network of Cultural Exchange and Interethnic Confidence (NCEIC) in **Sevastopol, Ukraine,** Tetyana Seniushkina, organized a three-day international seminar on the topic "Religion and Civil Society: New National Boundaries and the Paradoxes of the Globalization of Culture" at the end of November. NCEIC's website, developed with the assistance of IATP in 2003, helps to attract more people to the organization's activities, and as a result, more experts on building tolerance in multiethnic societies have been attending Semiushkina's eight seminars. She uses her multimedia skills to promote NCEIC at public

events, update its website, and disseminate information. Semiushkina has increased NCEIC's profile and managed to increase active participation from as few as 30 in 2003, to 120 at the November meeting, which included participants from Ukraine, Russia, the United States, and Chile.

NCEIC's international seminar on tolerance in civil society addressed religion and territory in a new context: globalization

A PhD in the Department of Political Science and Sociology at the National University of Tavria, Seniushkina has volunteered at the Sevastopol IATP Center since its opening. She has participated in and moderated IATP online discussions on tolerance and preventing ethnic intolerance. She actively collaborates with sociologists from the United States, Norway, Poland, and the Netherlands who readily come to the seminars and workshops organized by NCEIC to advocate for civil rights in multiethnic societies and to share European and American experiences in building civil society.

In recognition of her efforts to advocate tolerance and for creating NCEIC's website, Seniushkina was selected by the coordinators of the 153-nation project "1,000 Women for Peace" to represent Ukraine at the Nobel Prize Nomination in 2005. The project issued a book featuring information on the project's activities and photos of the 1,000 global representatives.

Citizens Get Legal Advice at IATP Center

On December 6, 2008, 17 residents of **Imishli, Azerbaijan,** received legal assistance from representatives of the American Bar Association (ABA). The meeting was organized by the local IATP center as part of the USAID-funded Traveling Lawyers project, which provides free legal advice to people in Azerbaijan's rural regions. So far, the pro-bono lawyers have consulted over 850 clients across the country.

The lawyers were asked to solve a host of problems, including land disputes, inheritance issues, social services problems, and criminal claims. Some issues required further legal follow-up from Baku, although many were resolved on the spot by the knowledgeable lawyers. In one case, a client with five children asked at what age his wife was eligible for a pension. His counsel responded that according to Article 8.1 of the Law of The Republic of Azerbaijan on Labor Pensions, women who have given birth to three or more children, have cared for them through age eight, and have paid social welfare taxes for at least five years, are conditionally entitled to a pension at age 49.

One man needed a document certifying his ownership over the house where he currently lives. This kind of problem is typical in Azerbaijan, especially in the country's remote provinces, as many villagers occupy and build houses on empty, unclaimed plots of land. He did so in 2004, and now requires documents certifying ownership of the property in order to sell the house. The Service of the State Registry of Real Estate

Azerbaijani citizens received free legal help from the American Bar Association's Traveling Lawyers program

refused his application, citing his lack of ownership over the land or the structure. The ABA lawyers told him that his only legal recourse would be to check whether the land was municipal property, and if so, buy it from the government. After that, he would be able to submit an application to build the house. If successful, he was instructed to apply to the State Registry and have the structure registered, certifying his right to it.

The IATP center's unique community center environment and public access point for information make it an ideal partner for other free services provided by USAID projects. One citizen, Celal Ahmedov, said, "This is the first time that we in Imishli have had access to legal consultation from Baku lawyers. We express our gratitude to USAID for supporting programs that help us get legal consultations for free."

Citizens Discuss Environmental Issues Online, Learn How They Can Act Offline
From December 22-26, 2008, the director of the NGO Civil Initiative Support Fund, Muazamma Burkhanova moderated an online discussion on "The Natural Condition of Tajikistan's Environment" for university and middle school teachers, entrepreneurs, representatives of NGOs, and students at five IATP centers throughout **Tajikistan**. The virtual discussion focused on the ecological challenges facing the country, challenges that are exacerbated by the national and global lack of unanimity on environmental issues. The

discussion participants also shared thoughts on measures taken by both governmental and non-governmental institutions in addressing these problems.

To begin the online discussion, Burhanova described how pollutants are causing the rapid disappearance of flora and fauna around the country. "For the last decade, the area of forests and of valuable natural ecosystems has been reduced, and the degradation of soil and thawing of glaciers with all their negative consequences have been taking place."

Mukarama Burkhanova responds to a query about Tajikistan's leading environmental issues

Dushanbe entrepreneur Shavkat Azimbaev asked, "Is there any attempt to develop national parks in Tajikistan? What happened to the famous national park Tiger Reserve?" Burhanova answered, "The ecological condition of [Tajikistan's] national parks…basically depends on [domestic] financial resources. In addition, their level of protection is based on how local populations use those resources." She added, "For a long time, the protection of the Tiger Reserve has been provided by the international organization World Wide Fund for Nature."

Second-year university student Zevar Shabozova asked, "The main ecological problem in our city is trash-burning. After five o'clock in the evening it is difficult to breathe. Are there any efforts [being made] regarding this issue?" Burhanova replied, "Debris contains a lot of dangerous and unhealthy ingredients and burning it, besides causing soil and air pollution, it affects people's health. In Dushanbe, the issue was submitted to the local municipality's legislature two years ago, which ended with the adoption of a regulation prohibiting burning of debris." She continued, "[Trash] burning is still continuing, however. The violators do receive fines if caught by authorities."

This online event enabled participants to acquire knowledge about legal tools for environmental protection, ways of promoting compliance in their communities, and current environmental trends and conditions in Tajikistan and around the globe. The participants also acquainted themselves with non-governmental and state organizations that work on environmental protection.

ICT FOR HEALTH

HIV/AIDS Expert Answers Citizens' Pressing Questions Online
An expert from the USAID-funded Project HOPE program in Central Asia answered the questions of more than 100 participants from **Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan** in an online forum on HIV/AIDS. Often a difficult issue to address directly in the region, and one where information is often unavailable, the forum gave participants the chance to get answers to questions they can not get from relatives, local media, or in some cases, even doctors.

Discussion was active on the IATP forum page (http://forum.iatp.net/) throughout its duration, from November 25 to December 10. MPH and Public Health Consultant specializing in HIV/AIDS Danielle S. Parsons answered a range of questions on preventing the disease for individuals and groups, on the myths and realities of the infection, as well as nontraditional ways of getting infected. The forum participants also shared views on how they would support HIV-infected friends and family members.

Jennet from Turkmenistan found out which behaviors were safe and unsafe, and commented after the forum, "This forum is very helpful, because nobody will look strangely at me for asking these questions. I can't ask my parents these questions…and in the future when dating I'll need to know how to explore safely." Another participant remarked, "I have a friend who [is infected] and I will try to help her. Thank you, and my wish is that there will be more such forums. I thought that these types of forums were just for people's uninformed perspectives, but now I see that they really work."

MedIT Graduate Creates His Institution's Website to Better Serve the Local Population
Residents of **Chisinau, Moldova,** now have a reliable and up-to-date resource on city medical services thanks to a new website published in December by IATP trainee and physician Vasilii Pancev.

Pancev is one of the over 100 medical professionals who completed a step-by-step training series in 2007 as part of the IATP MedIT project. As a result of the project, the doctors developed their own internet resource for their institution – the Center of Family Physicians in Chisinau.

Pancev and his colleagues decided to create a resource for both patients and hospital employees, which would contain information on

Healthcare providers learn computer and internet skills during an IATP mobile training in Cimislia, Moldova

the Center's services and staff (http://cmf-cimislia.md.iatp.net). Now, patients can learn about office hours, hospital services, and physicians' contact information. Pancev's website has enabled the Center to devote more of its resources to patient care. Just as Vasilii Pancev created an invaluable resource for his institution, medical professionals throughout Moldova are improving their services thanks to IATP training.